

**TESTIMONY OF MR. JERRY ENSMINGER
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON
"CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AFFECTING THE READINESS OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE"**

April 21, 2003

First, I would like to say that I am greatly honored and appreciative to the chairman and the members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee for affording me this opportunity to testify before them. My name is Jerry Ensminger; I spent 24 ½ years serving my country faithfully in the United States Marine Corps. I am here to provide testimony for a group of our citizens who are unable to speak for themselves. They are a growing list of children who were conceived while their parents lived on military bases where their drinking water was contaminated. Many of these children were born with serious debilitating birth defects or with defects serious enough to kill them. Many more of these children who were exposed while in utero, that were seemingly normal, later developed childhood cancers. Such was the case with my daughter Jane. Jane was conceived while her mother and I lived in military housing at Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune, N.C. (MCB, CLNC). When Jane was 6 year old, she was diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia (ALL). Beginning in 1999, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) conducted an Adverse Pregnancy Outcome survey of women who were pregnant and living on base between the years of 1968-1985. The ATSDR survey located 12,598 out of an estimated 16,500 children and they released their findings in a report on 18 July 2003. ATSDR identified 33 Neural tube defects, 41 Oral clefts, 22 Childhood leukemia, 7 Childhood lymphoma, for a total of 103 adversely affected children who were exposed to contaminated drinking water while in utero. To give you an idea of how Camp Lejeune stacked against the rest of our nation for this same time period, I have compiled the following statistics. Camp Lejeune was 265 times higher than the national average for Neural Tube defects and 15.7 times higher in childhood cancer rates. These numbers do not take into consideration the staggering number of spontaneous abortions suffered by Camp Lejeune women during this time period. To date, no survey, or study has been conducted (nor have been proposed) for non in-utero children or adult populations that were exposed while at Camp Lejeune.

It has since been discovered that United States Marine Corps (USMC) and Department of the Navy (DoN) authorities knew that the drinking water at Camp Lejeune was highly contaminated with volatile organic chemicals (VOCs), cleaning solvents. The most appalling fact is that these authorities knew about this contamination for nearly 5 years before they took any action to correct it! Several different analytical laboratories told Camp Lejeune officials that they had found high levels of these chemicals in their drinking water. Mr. Bruce A. Babson,

a chemist at Grainger laboratories of Raleigh, N.C. went to the extreme of writing a 10 August 1982 letter to the Commanding General of Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune, N.C. In his letter, Mr. Babson told Camp Lejeune that the high levels of chemicals that he had found in their drinking water were of more importance from a health standpoint than what they had sent the water to be tested for in the first place (TTHM's). Did military officials take any action? Absolutely not, even though this was the 3rd different laboratory to tell them they had VOC's in their drinking water, they went as far as to question the findings by this laboratory. Military officials did not bother to test their individual drinking water supply wells until July 1984. This was the month after the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that they were proposing regulatory levels for the same exact chemicals, which had been found in Camp Lejeune's drinking water for 4 years by this point.

Had the EPA not announced these proposed regulatory levels for these chemicals would the military have taken the necessary actions to alleviate them from their drinking water? The answer to that question is something that none of us can answer. However, by reviewing the inactivity by the military prior to the EPA's announcement, it is highly probable that they would have continued to do what they had done up to that point: ABSOLUTELY NOTHING! The only reasoning that USMC and DoN officials give for not taking action to alleviate these known chemicals in their drinking water is that there were no "enforceable" regulatory levels established for these chemicals! Recently, documents have been discovered that strongly suggest that USMC and DoD officials provided the ATSDR with incorrect water system data in hopes of minimizing their findings of adverse health effects. These are only a few examples why the Department of Defense does not need immunities from any environmental regulations. Currently, there are not any "enforceable" Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCL's) established for Perchlorate, TNT, RDX, HMX, and White Phosphorus in drinking water. It is quite apparent from examining the Camp Lejeune situation that the military will not, and cannot be trusted to police themselves. From my own past experiences, it makes me shudder to think that the military would be granted immunities from any environmental regulations or the oversight by the federal and state agencies that were created for these purposes. To grant these immunities we would be affording the DoD "a license to kill" their personnel and their families in far more t

141 out of the 171 federally operated sites that now appear on the National Priority List for contamination are military installations. This alone should be testimony enough for the disregard the DoD has for the environment and the welfare of their own people. However, if this fact is not enough of a deterrent, perhaps this next fact will convince you. My daughter Jane fought a courageous battle against her malignancy for nearly 2 ½ years, she literally went through hell and all of us who loved her went through hell with her. The leukemia eventually won the war, on 24 September 1985 Janey succumbed to her disease; she was

only 9 years old. No! DoD does not need, nor do they warrant less scrutiny from environmental agencies, in fact, it is my opinion that they need stricter oversight.